

THE RED TRAIL

CHAPTER XIX.

The newcomer walked gracefully up to Don Sebastian, still holding his hat in his right hand, bowed to him with equal grace, and thrusting his hand into his side, he said with an accent of cutting sarcasm, in a harsh, metallic voice:

"Do you recognize me, Don Sebastian, and do you believe I am really alive?"

At the same moment Belhumeur's knowing face could be seen peering through the doorway. With his eyes instantly fixed on the General, he seemed to be impatiently expecting an answer, which the latter evidently hesitated to give.

"Who are you, senor?" said the General, "and by what right do you question me?"

"Well played," said Valentine. "Caballero, you are a rude adversary."

"Do you think so?" Don Sebastian asked, with a hoarse laugh.

"Certainly," the hunter continued, "and I am delighted to hear my testimony to the fact; hence you had better yield at once, for you are in a dilemma from which you cannot escape."

There was a silence lasting some minutes. At length the general seemed to make up his mind, for he turned to Belhumeur, who was still listening, and bowed to him with ironical politeness.

"Why stand half hidden by that door?" he said to him. "Pray enter, caballero."

The Canadian at once entered, and after giving the general a respectful bow, he leaned over the back of Valentine's chair. The latter eagerly followed all the incidents of the strange scene that was being played before him, and in which he appeared to be a disinterested spectator, rather than an actor.

"I am waiting," the general said, as he fell back in his chair with an air of weariness.

"We will bring matters to an end," Valentine said, drawing himself up with an air of resolution. "General, you will at once leave Mexico and give up Dona Anita, to whom you will not only restore her liberty, but also the right of giving her hand and fortune to whomsoever she pleases. You will sell your estates and retire to the United States, promising on oath never to return. On my side, I pledge myself to restore to you your daughter's body."

"Have you anything more to add?" the general coolly asked.

"Nothing," he said, calm, superior. "I too, have taken an oath, and from what I told you must have seen how far I have detected your secrets. Accept or refuse, but come to a decision, for this is the last time we shall meet face to face under the like conditions. The game we are playing is a terrible one, and must end in the death of one of us, and I shall show you no pity, as doubtless, you will show me none. Reflect seriously before answering yes or no, and I give you half an hour to decide."

The general rang the bell and the footman came in.

"Order the carriage," he said to him.

"Then," Valentine said as he rose, "it is war to the death between us."

"War to the death! Is it so?"

"We shall only meet once again, General," the hunter remarked; "and that will be on the eve of your death, when you are in Capilla."

"I accept the meeting, and will bow uncomplainingly before you if you are powerful enough to obtain that result; but, believe me, I am not there yet."

"You are nearer your fall than you perhaps suppose."

"That is possible; but enough of this. Light these gentlemen down," he said to the servant, who at this moment entered the room.

When the general entered his box at the theater, which was in the first circle, and almost facing the stage, the house presented a truly fairy-like appearance. The president's box was occupied by the first magistrate of the republic and some of his aide-de-camps. Several times Don Sebastian fancied that the president's eyes were fixed on him with a strange expression, after which he bent over and whispered some remarks to the gentlemen who accompanied him. Perhaps this was not real, and the general's pricked conscience suggested to him suspicious far from the thoughts of those against whom he had so many reasons to be on his guard; but real or not, these suspicions tortured his heart and proved to him the necessity of coming to an end at all risks.

Still the performance went on; the curtain had just fallen after the last act, and the general, devoured by anxiety, and persuaded that he had remained long enough in the theater to testify his presence, was preparing to retire, when the door of his box opened, and Col. Lupu walked in.

"Ah, is it you, colonel?" Don Sebastian said to him as he offered him his hand.

"Pray do not let me stop you, general, I have only a few words to say to you."

"Our business?"

"Does not amuse you?"

"No suspicion?"

"Not the shadow."

The general breathed like a man from whose chest a crushing weight has been removed.

"Can I be of any service to you?" he said, absently.

"For the present, I have only come for your sake."

"How so?"

"Well, I was accosted to-day by a lepero, a villain of the worst sort, who says he wishes to avenge himself on a certain Frenchman, whom he declares you know, and he desires to place himself under your protection, in the event of the hands of his navaja accidentally slipping into his enemy's body."

"Did this worthy gentleman tell you his name, my dear colonel?"

"Yes; but I believe that it would be better to mention it in the open air, rather than in this place."

They left the theater and proceeded toward the Puerta de Mercaderes, which were entirely deserted at this advanced hour of the night.

CHAPTER XX.

"Now, Senor Don Jaime," said the general, "let us speak frankly, if you please."

"I wish for nothing better," the colonel replied.

"And to begin," Don Sebastian continued, "tell me who this man is from whom you hinted that I could derive some benefit."

"This man is a villain of the worst sort, as I already have the honor of telling you; his antecedents are, I suppose, rather dark, and that is all I have been able to discover."

"I think I remember. Was not this villain known by the sobriquet of the Zaragata?"

"He was, general; furious at what happened to him, and attributing it to Don Valentine, he took an oath to kill him whenever he met him."

"I must not and will not see him; but do you deal with him as you think proper. You understand that it is of the utmost importance that I should be ignorant of the arrangements you may make with him, and be able to prove, if necessary, that I had no knowledge of this. Moreover, as you are aware, I am not one for extreme measures; the sight of such a villain would be repulsive to me, for I have such a horror of bloodshed."

"I understand you only too well."

"What mean you?"

"That, if we succeed, you will be president of the republic."

"Remember, you will be a general and military governor of our richest State, Sonora," the other answered.

"It is useless to remind me of your promises, general; you are well aware that I am devoted to you."

"I know it, of course, and on that account leave you. Good-night, and come and breakfast with me to-morrow."

"I will not fail, general." The general pulled his hat over his eyes, wrapped himself in his cloak and went off hastily. On being left alone, the colonel remained plunged in deep thought; the office with which he was entrusted, for he perfectly caught the meaning of the general's hints, was serious.

At the moment when the colonel mechanically raised his head and looked despairingly up to heaven, he fancied he saw several suspicious shadows prowling about him in a suggestive manner. But the colonel was brave, and the more so because he had literally nothing to lose, hence he quietly loosened his sword, opened his cloak, and at the instant when four or five fellows attacked him at once with machetes and long navajas, he was on guard according to all the rules of the art, with his left foot supported by a pillar and his cloak wrapped like a buckler round his arm.

The attack was a rude one, but the colonel withstood it manfully; besides, all went on in the Mexican way, without shout or call for help.

Still the assailants, who were armed with short and heavy weapons, had the disadvantage against the colonel's long and thin sword, which he twisted like a snake, writhed round their weapons, and had already pricked two of the men sharply enough to make the others reflect and display greater prudence in their attack. The colonel felt that they were giving ground.

"Come on, villanos," he exclaimed, as he gave a terrific lunge and ran one of the bandits right through the body, who rolled on the pavement with a yell of pain.

"Stop, stop!" the man who seemed the leader of the bandits exclaimed; "we are mistaken."

As the bandits asked for nothing better than to stop, they retreated a few steps without hesitation.

"Can it possibly be you," the first speaker continued, "Senor Colonel Don Jaime Lupu?"

"Hail!" the colonel said, falling back a step in surprise, "who mentioned my name?"

"I, excellency, a friend."

"A friend? A strange friend who has been trying to assassinate me for the last ten minutes."

"Believe me, colonel, that had we known whom we had to deal with, we should never have attacked you. All this is the result of a deplorable misunderstanding, which you will, however, excuse."

"But who are you?"

"What, excellency, do you not recognize the Zaragata?" the colonel exclaimed with glad surprise. "Well, seconded, are you aware that yours is a singular trade?"

"Alas! excellency, a man must do what he can," the bandit replied, in a sorrowful voice.

The colonel looked at him anxiously.

"I understand the cause of your grief," he said; "and it is the worse, because there is no remedy for it."

"Do you think so?"

"Capital! I am certain of it."

"You may be mistaken, excellency."

"Nonsense. You who so graciously place yourself at the service of those who have an insult to avenge, are forced to renounce your own vengeance."

"Oh, no, excellency, what is that you are saying?"

"I am speaking the truth. You hate the Frenchman whom you mentioned to me to-day, but you are afraid of him."

"Afraid!" he exclaimed, angrily. "I bet you that you will not dare avenge yourself on your enemy within the next four-and-twenty hours, not even with the help of your twelve companions."

"And what will you bet, excellency?"

"Well, I am so certain of running no risk that I will bet you one hundred ounces. Does that suit you?"

"One hundred ounces!" the bandit exclaimed, his eyes sparkling with greed. "I would kill my own brother for such a sum."

CHAPTER XXI.

The house taken for Valentine by M. Rallier was, as we have already stated, situated in the Calle de Tacuba, only a

few yards from the mansion belonging to General Don Sebastian Guerrero.

The hunter, therefore, would only have had a few steps to go to reach home after leaving the general. But suspecting that the latter might have given orders to have his carriage followed, he ordered his coachman to drive to the Alameda.

As the night was far advanced, the promenade had abandoned the shady walks of the Alameda, which was now completely deserted. This doubtless was what the hunter desired, for, on reaching about the center of the drive, he ordered the coachman to stop, and got out with his companions.

Valentine, like all men accustomed to desert life, had an instinctive distrust of stone walls, behind which, in his fancy, a spy was continually listening. Hence, when he had an important affair to discuss, or a serious matter to communicate to his friends, he preferred going to the Alameda, or somewhere in the environs of Mexico, where after posing Curumilla as sentry, he believed that he could safely confide his closest secrets to the friends he conveyed to the strange open-air council.

On reaching a thick clump of trees the hunter stopped.

"We shall be comfortable here," he said.

"The trees have eyes, and the leaves ears," Belhumeur answered sentimentally. "Yes," Valentine remarked with a smile, "if you do not take the precaution to frighten away spies!" at the same moment he imitated the soft cadenced hiss of the coral snake.

A similar hiss was heard from the center of the clump and seemed like an echo. "That is the chief's signal," the Canadian said. "He has been watching for us there for nearly an hour. Do you now believe that we are in safety?"

"Certainly," when Curumilla watches over us we have no surprise to apprehend."

"Let us talk then," said Don Martial. "One moment," Valentine remarked. "We must first hear the report of a friend."

"Whom are you alluding to?"

"You shall see," Valentine answered, and clasped his hands thrice softly.

Immediately a slight sound and a gentle rustling of leaves was heard in a neighboring thicket, and a man emerged, about four paces from the hunters. It was Curumilla, the capataz.

"Good evening, señores," he said, with a polite bow. "I have been awaiting your coming for nearly an hour."

"We were detained longer than we expected by General Guerrero."

"Do you come from him?"

"Did I not tell you I would call on him?"

"Yes; but I hardly thought that you would have the temerity to venture into the lion's den."

"Nonsense," Valentine said with a disdainful smile, "the lion, as you call him, I assure you, was remarkably tame; he drew his claw, completely and received us with the most exquisite politeness."

"In that case take care," the capataz replied, with a shake of the head; "if he received you in that way, he is, assuredly, preparing a terrible plot."

"I am of the same opinion; the question is, whether we shall allow him time to act."

"He is very clever, my dear Valentine," the capataz continued, "and seems to possess an intuition of evil. In spite of the oath I took to you when, on your entreaty, I consented to remain in his service, there are days when, although I possess a thorough knowledge of his character, he terrifies me, and I feel on the point of giving up the rude task which, through devotion to you, I have imposed on myself."

"Courage, my friend; persevere but a few days longer, and believe me, we shall all be avenged."

"May heaven grant it!" the capataz said with a sigh; "but I confess that I dare not believe it, even though it is you who assure me of the fact."

(To be continued.)

Kissing Days at Hungerford.

Yesterday was "kissing day" at Hungerford, a quiet community on the western borders of Berkshire, renowned for its trout fishery and its faithful adherence to the ancient customs of Hocktide, which have been observed since the days of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who granted the rights and privileges to the commoners.

At daybreak the town crier, arrayed in new livery, took his stand on the town hall balcony and blew his lusty blasts on the historic horn, which is the symbol of Hungerfordian liberty. Then the "tuttimen" went forth bearing staves garlanded with flowers and made a perambulation of the town, kissing every lady whom they met and demanding a penny from every male householder.

The sun thus obtained served to purchase oranges for scrambling among the crowd of children who followed in their footsteps. The ladies took the kissing in good part and the males paid up smilingly.

Meanwhile the Hocktide jury was transacting more serious business in the town hall, electing a constable, who is both a coroner and a mayor; also appointing keepers of the keys of the common coffer, bailiff, portreeve and other ancient officers whose duties are rather obscure.—London Evening Standard.

Know Neither Nurse Nor Baby.

"What a bright little thing!" exclaimed the society woman, patronizingly cooling at a baby out for an airing in the park. "Whose little one is this?"

"Yours, ma'am," replied the nurse. "I'm the new nurse that kept yesterday."—New York Press.

That's What Hurt.

"I don't like that there Mrs. Swellman at all," said Mrs. Nurtich.

"Well, you ain't got to take no notice of her," replied Mr. Nurtich.

"But the trouble is she don't take no notice o' me."—Philadelphia Press.

In 1906 two cats inherited \$20,000 each from B. F. Dilley, an eccentric millionaire.

WILL PROTECT CHINA

President Roosevelt Cognizant of Japan's Game.

COREA ONLY A STEPPING STONE

Japan Blustered About School Question in California Only to Get Free Hand in China.

San Francisco, Sept. 24.—That the Japanese question has not been settled but is merely in its infancy is the belief of a large number of naval officers who have arrived at San Francisco with the advance guard of the fleet that is to be mobilized in Pacific waters. According to these authorities, the fleet has been ordered to the Pacific not so much as a warning to Japan for her past actions as for a floating protest against her contemplated seizure of China. In fact, these naval men interpret that the presence of the fleet on this side of the continent as a message to Japan clearly saying: "Thou shalt not steal China."

These authorities bring forward a number of interesting facts to support their contention. In the first place they point out that a treaty existed between the United States and Korea which was the nearest thing to an alliance that the United States has undertaken. This treaty under a possible construction pledged the American government to protect Korea against just such a coup as Japan has carried to a successful conclusion. It is said that immediately after the Portsmouth treaty was signed, in which, by the way, Japan guaranteed the independence of Korea, the island empire basing herself upon the hands of all the big European powers by means of treaties and alliances. The United States government was the only big power with the exception of Germany not included in this arrangement.

The naval officers above referred to give it as their opinion that the ill feeling stirred up between the United States and Japan was the work of the Japanese government. While Japan was belligerently protesting against the attitude of the Californians toward the Japanese, it was doing nothing more or less, according to the authorities cited, than holding America at a distance with one hand while with the other it was choking the life out of Korea.

The naval officers hold that as soon as Japan took possession of Corea Mr. Roosevelt was convinced that the next move would involve China, and accordingly began preparations for active interference. The United States sat quietly while Japan put Corea in its back pocket. It will not sit quietly if Japan makes the effort to deal in the same manner with China.

The big fleet of warships to be gathered on the Pacific coast will serve to remind Japan that the entity of China is one of the cardinal foreign policies of the American government. To just what lengths the country will go to preserve the Chinese empire from Japan is yet to be determined.

LAST TECHNICALITY FAILS.

Supreme Court Upholds Indictments of Accused Bribers.

San Francisco, Sept. 24.—The state Supreme court late yesterday rendered a decision upholding the validity of the so-called Oliver grand jury. On this decision depended the fate of the indictments found subsequent to March last.

The attack was made on the grand jury by William M. Abbott, of the United Railroads; Frank G. Drum, John Martin and Eugene De Sabia, of the San Francisco Gas company, and other defendants to test the validity of the indictments charging them with bribery. They contended that in February last the names for a new grand jury were drawn and that, while the Oliver jury had not been discharged, its powers lapsed with the first step taken to impeach its successor.

Justice McFarland filed a dissenting opinion.

Has New Rebate Evidence.

New York, Sept. 24.—It is understood that Frank B. Kellogg, the government's counsel in its suit to dissolve the Standard Oil company of New Jersey, has important evidence in his possession bearing on alleged relationship between railroad rebates and the profits of the corporation in the last eight years. It is also said that this phase of Mr. Kellogg's case is being reserved until the line of questioning he pursued last week is finished. Mr. Kellogg has had subpoenas served on several railroad men.

Several May Defend Cup.

New York, Sept. 24.—Preparations for the defense of the America's cup has begun. At least one syndicate is being organized and possibly more. Everyone appears to be of the opinion that the management will be vested in E. D. Morgan. Those mentioned as generous subscribers are Edward H. Harriman, Colonel Robert M. Thompson, C. K. G. Billings and Roy A. Rainey. The cost of producing the Reliance would be upward of \$500,000.

First Snow in Chicago.

Chicago, Sept. 24.—A few flakes of snow fell here late yesterday. The fall was not large enough to be recognized by the weather bureau, but for several minutes it was plainly visible.

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No. 9—

Leaves Corvallis.....12:30 P. M.

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No. 7—

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